

A fly's eye view of the American war against Vietnam

40 years later: who won which war?

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Landing on the table: 1976

After 40 years there remains no easy answer to this question; or better said, there are at least as many answers as there were wars.

In 2005 at a US State Department conference held in combination with the publication of the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volumes covering the US war, Barry Zorthian said in an exchange with Marvin Kalb, 'I say to you there is no single Vietnam War.'¹ He did not count them or name the others. Nonetheless it may be useful to reformulate the question: who won which war in Vietnam?

When I was about 16 years old I wrote a term paper for my English class and asked the question 'Why did the US lose the war in Vietnam?' That was in 1976. I had a very simple conclusion after reading the books and whatever elements of the Congressional Record I could find in the county library: the US had no war aims that it was capable of attaining with the means at its disposal.

However, growing up as a virtual 'Navy brat' I still thought until 1975 that I would graduate and land in a jungle

¹ The Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), is the official documentary record of US foreign policy published by the US Department of State (Office of the Historian). See <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>>. Barry Zorthian (1920-2010) was head of USIA/JUSPOA (Joint United States Public Affairs Office) in Saigon from 1964 until 1968. JUSPOA was the central office for press, propaganda and psychological operations in the US mission in Vietnam. The conference was 'The American Experience in Southeast Asia 1946-1975', Washington, DC 29-30 September 2010. See <<https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia>>.

full of booby traps and snipers like those depicted in John Wayne's fake film, *The Green Berets*.² In other words, as a pubescent young man I unknowingly shared the view of many hard-core policy makers and combatants that this war would not end anywhere in the near future.

Yet the scenes of retreat I, too, saw on television in April 1975 did not mean much more to me than that I would not end up dead on some jungle patrol. I confess I never believed that communism was on our doorstep. I had begun to read some military history and nothing could convince me that Russians could march across the Bering Strait or land on the beach of the coastal island where I lived and send us all to gulags. I had read Solzhenitsyn and that all struck me as terribly Russian and very, very far away.³ What we arrogantly call civilisation in the West never seemed to me in imminent danger — except perhaps from people like my school principal and the corrupt teachers that worked for him. Maybe something had gone wrong with my indoctrination, I mean education, since despite years in one of the most reactionary parts of the US I did not acquire the endemic paranoid-schizophrenia that passes for political culture in North America between the St. Lawrence and the Rio Bravo.

I had an uncle who was unwittingly abused both physically and mentally after at least three tours in Thailand, before he retired from the Air Force. The rest of the family seemed to have been left largely unscathed, either too old or too young (like me) to have been sucked into the venal vortex of viciousness.⁴ That — at least in 1976 — was 'my Vietnam war'.

² *The Green Berets* (1968) was a film directed by and starring John Wayne, seen by him as advocacy for the US war effort in Vietnam. Nominally based on a book of the same title by Robin Moore about his experience with the US Special Forces at Fort Bragg and in Vietnam with the 5th Special Forces Group, the film was utterly panned, even in the *New York Times* (Renata Adler, 20 June 1968).

³ *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in English in 1974.

⁴ Pardon my retort to US Vice President Spiro Agnew's infamous alliteration, calling liberals 'nattering nabobs of negativism' in an address delivered to the California state Republican convention held in San Diego in 1970.

However I do not think that does justice to Mr Zorthian's remark. If there was more than one Vietnam War, what did he mean? Historical scholarship distinguishes formally between the first and second war in Indochina. The first war was waged against the French and the second against the United States. Despite the chronological convenience that implies, I think it is far more accurate to speak about at least four wars in Vietnam. I will try to describe them briefly and then elaborate possible answers to the questions this framework implies.

War nos. 1-4

The most obvious one is the invasion and occupation of Vietnam by the US regime in violation of its sovereignty and the dignity of its people. This invasion began well before US Marines landed near Da Nang on 8 March 1965. It began with the decision of the country's white settler elite to use covert and clandestine means to prevent the implementation of the Geneva Accords by which the French had to concede control of Vietnam to the people who had lived there for thousands of years and who had been exploited for the previous century by French and Japanese conquerors.⁵

Then there was a second Vietnam War. That was the war most people in the US remember, whether from numerous tours as soldiers or as television viewers. This was the daily violence on an unimaginable scale guided by numbing bureaucratic processes that seemed to reduce the mass murder to soporific tedium. It was the war that sent mainly African-Americans and poor whites to kill 'gooks' ostensibly to

⁵ The Geneva Agreements of 1954 ended the First Indochina War. Central provisions were a ceasefire and withdrawal of French troops. French Indochina was split into Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Vietnam was temporarily divided along the 17th parallel until elections could be held. The French 'shell company', the Republic of Vietnam, was managed by first by Bao Dai and then Ngo Dinh Diem from Saigon when the US took over. Ho Chi Minh led the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from Hanoi. The US did not sign the agreement and did not consider itself bound by its terms.

protect rights they scarcely enjoyed at home.⁶ It was the war that turned a brief period of post-WWII prosperity into an unending autorotation⁷ from which most of the working population of the US never recovered.

The third Vietnam War is the covert war waged against the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia — with ‘collateral damage’ in the US itself. Much more needs to be said about this war since it remains largely hidden in the swamp of deniability.

Finally there was the fourth Vietnam War: the unrelenting hostility combined with all the available systemic weapons deployed since 1975 in order to both punish and further exploit the Vietnamese people while expanding the covert terror system developed in the third Vietnam War. This was the continuation of the ‘Big Picture’, the crusade that began as early as 1776 when the ‘white man’s empire’ declared its unilateral independence from Great Britain.⁸

Having named the wars concerned it might be possible to ask why they were waged, who won – if anyone – and what lessons were learned or not. Without counting how often all sorts of clever folks have repeated the adage about

6 On 28 April 1967, heavyweight boxing champion Mohammed Ali (aka Cassius Clay) refused to accept his draft into the US Army to be sent to Vietnam. He explained: ‘Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?...’

7 An autorotation is a standard emergency procedure for landing or ‘restarting’ a helicopter in the event of engine failure. The pitch of the blades is adjusted so that the rotor will turn more rapidly in descent, either slowing the descent to a speed which softens the crash or firing the motor again so that the pilot can recover flight control.

8 The Big Picture was a series of US Army propaganda films broadcast by ABC-TV from 1951-1964. The unilateral declaration of independence in 1776 arguably aimed to preserve chattel slavery and free the British colonies in North America to expand beyond the boundaries set by the 1763 Treaty of Paris. See Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (2014). The term ‘white settler-colonial regime’ was popularised in Left criticism of white supremacist states in Southern Africa (especially Rhodesia, Mozambique, South Africa). However the term can be and has been applied to describe the US regime, e.g. in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (2014).

'learning from history', Tolstoy wrote more than a century ago in *War and Peace* (1869) that nobody has ever been persuaded by mere words. As long as the 'lessons' people talk about do not go beyond talk, nothing at all will be learned. But even this assertion must be qualified because lessons have been learned from the war against Vietnam. Unfortunately these lessons are not for everybody and they are rarely discussed in open. This suggests in itself that despite all the talk, the very people who were supposed to have opposed the war against Vietnam have learned the least from history.

A war of unlimited opportunity (part one)

The US invaded Vietnam publicly in the 'wake' of the so-called Tonkin Gulf Resolution in 1964.⁹ Since then this action by the US regime is customarily dignified by the term 'intervention'. Although the pretext for the congressional resolution was at least suspicious then and long since discredited as fraudulent, the perception of the war as an 'intervention' is still widely shared.¹⁰ 'Intervention' is itself a term of deception. It implies that the US was an intervener, that it joined a pre-existing dispute lending an air of impartiality or indifference to the substance; or, even worse, that it had no prior role in the dispute or relationship to the parties. The failure (refusal) to seek an explicit constitutionally defined framework, e.g. a declaration of war or other legal status, reinforces the belief that the US invasion was spontaneous, a reaction rather than a planned measure. The absence of any unequivocal legal instrument directing the US president to act also guaranteed what became a virtually unrestricted field of discretion for the executive in the conduct of operations (overt and covert) in

⁹ Southeast Asia Resolution, 7 August 1964. Adopted unanimously in the House of Representatives, only two US Senators voted against it, Wayne Morse (Oregon) and Ernst Groening (Alaska), both Democrats.

¹⁰ The term 'intervention' is used throughout the historical literature to refer to US military operations in the absence of a formal declaration of war under the US Constitution, which reserves to the Congress the power to declare war (Article I, section 8, clause 11). The War Powers Resolution of 1973 was adopted over presidential veto to reaffirm explicitly the necessity of congressional authorisation for deployment of US military in armed conflict outside the United States.

Indochina. This omission imposed a burden upon all opponents of the war to seek specific remedies, e.g. singular prohibitions, denial of funds or rejection of appointments; in other words it pre-shaped the constitutional resistance to the war from the beginning.

It also shaped the language and scope of action for the political opposition in the country as a whole. Already the war against Korea and the great purge, commonly associated with Senator McCarthy, had established the new terms of reference for US Asia-Pacific policy.¹¹ By conflating the theatre conflict the US was conducting against the Soviet Union in Europe with all other foreign expeditionary aims, the well-cultivated antagonism toward the Soviet Union was transferred to US foreign policy as a whole.

Prior to 1945, the US regime had relied upon the navy and marines to execute foreign policy. Thus most violence was wreaked by volunteer and elite forces with which the general public had minimal contact. Very little attention was paid to Latin America and the Philippines. Only Mexico served as a venue for publicity and promotion of military careers. When the US invaded Korea in 1945 little attention was devoted to the activities of either the US Military Government in Korea (USMGK) or the driving force in Asia — Douglas MacArthur's viceroyalty in Tokyo with its plans for expansion into China.¹²

¹¹ Commonly referred to as the 'McCarthy era' or the Second Red Scare, the purge began well before Senator McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) attained prominence. The expiration of wage and price controls imposed during WWII led to labour demands for wage increases, which met with violent resistance by employers and hence increased industrial action by unions. Employer organisations combined to advocate strong anti-union legislation, e.g. the 1947 Labor Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act that effectively repealed key New Deal legislation like the 1935 National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act. The first 'red scare' was an equally repressive period between 1917 and 1920, immediately following the October Revolution in Russia (Soviet Union).

¹² Arthur MacArthur, Jr. was the Military Governor of the Philippines (1900-1901). His son Douglas MacArthur was appointed Military Advisor to the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines in 1935, a position he held until the Japanese occupation of the US colony.

It took the surprise battle between the army of the PDRK¹³ and the surrogate army of US vassal Syngman Rhee to force the regime into its first major propaganda campaign since Pearl Harbor in 1941. Truman's officials claimed that communists had invaded the South — implying that they were anything but Koreans — and that the US was obliged to aid its man in Seoul by mobilising US forces to defend South Korea from the communists. The communists had already seized China and forced the Chinese into exile on the island of Formosa. There was imminent danger of all Asia being conquered by foreigners (communists) and the fact that the South had to combat a fully-armed force of regular soldiers meant that this was a threat to world peace, triggering United Nations action. The Koreans living in the North, separated by US fiat from the rest of their country, including families, were decreed *en masse* to be communist non-persons and white Americans had been urged to fanatical hatred of communists, especially as non-Americans, the extermination of which became a self-evident and holy cause.

Fantasy threat

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution pre-empted any need to appeal to international bodies, gave the executive *carte blanche* to wage war (albeit without calling it that) and served as proof that Americans must support their leaders in the elimination of the communist threat. That threat was a fantasy, a propaganda contrivance, but it remained an effective device for controlling the scope of dissent in the US and its vassal states. It was so effective that most of the debate, in the US at least, focussed not on the US invasion, slaughter and destruction of Vietnam (or Korea before that) but whether the enemy or the opposition was really communist, or whether there was an alternative to annihilating communists, or whether communists could be converted from the errors of their ways. Part of this continuing idiocy, even found among *bona fide* opponents of the war, is that not even actual regime policy is consistently

¹³ People's Democratic Republic of Korea (PDRK), created in the north after the US forced the division of the peninsula.

anti-communist.¹⁴ The propaganda is so effective in stipulating the terms of reference for US foreign policy that 'communism' is reified as a true movement challenging Americans when it is nothing of the sort.

A basic Cold War tenet — again very widely accepted in the US — was that the emergence of independent countries from the remains of European empires had to be protected from an expanding Soviet Union.¹⁵ To render this model plausible, the emerging states were compared with Eastern Europe, where supposedly the Soviet Union had unilaterally conquered Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and the Baltic States. This historical distortion could be sold in part because the US regime had a substantial contingent of refugees from these countries, including Nazi collaborators, who could promote this image from posts in academia and the media.¹⁶

No amount of appeals, argument or facts, even from people like Kwame Nkrumah or Ho Chi Minh, who had lived in the US and admired it, could overcome the disinformation used by the US government and US corporations to depict any

14 Philip Agee pointed out that in Latin America the CIA station were passing money to everyone, including the Left. The US/UK supported Pol Pot in Cambodia (against Vietnam). In another words there have always been policy decisions or actions taken which at least appear inconsistent with fundamentalist anti-communism. Hence a public policy of 'opposing communism' cannot be taken at face value, nor can this policy in practice be taken as a measure of what strategic objectives were being pursued by the US regime.

15 In 1949 the People's Army under Mao Zedong defeated the Kuomintang under Chiang-Kai-Shek and it had to evacuate the mainland and move to the island of Formosa where it continued under US protection. The mainland became the People's Republic of China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The defeat of the right wing of the old Chinese Nationalist Party, founded by Sun Yat-Sen, in the civil war following the defeat of Japan, triggered a massive conflict in the US as to 'who lost China to the Reds', a conflict that fuelled the great purge already under way. Both Mao and Chiang had been members of the Kuomintang until the Japanese occupation when the party split.

16 The history of overt and covert recruitment of Nazi and fascist recruits for service to the US starting in 1945 is too extensive to elaborate here. See e.g. Christopher Simpson, *Blowback* (1988) reissued in Forbidden Bookshelf e-book series.

nationalist leader not utterly subservient to Washington or New York as a stooge of Moscow and the international communist conspiracy.¹⁷ The usual responses of domestic opposition to this form of international redbaiting were either to insist that the country's leader was not a communist or to advocate more support to insulate the country from Marxist influence. Another option deemed acceptable by liberal opponents of a leader or party on the US regime's black list is to encourage also official support of alternatives that could dilute the supposed concentration of power and engender a competitive system like that in the US (despite the fact that the US system itself is anything but competitive).

Despite the declassification of numerous foreign policy documents (e.g. NSC 68) produced before the US war against Korea, the public debate, whether among academics or lay people, still focuses on such issues as (a) was there a communist threat in fact? (b) was there a risk to other countries and to the region as a whole that had to be prevented or minimised? and (c) did US action actually serve to check (contain), if not rollback (imputed) Soviet and/or Chinese expansionism? Subsidiary justification for 'intervention' was found in the need to deter future threats and to demonstrate the will and ability to fulfil obligations (to whom?) as 'champion or guarantor of the free world'.

Walt Rostow's 'stages of development' theory provided an additional argument for US intervention in order to protect new nations in their initial stages so that they would mature into the right kind of political-economic entities.¹⁸ To do this the US regime would guarantee the country at whose invitation it came freedom from foreign interference (the US

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), first president of Ghana, the first African colony (formerly Gold Coast) to achieve independence from Great Britain (1960), had earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in the United States. Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) travelled in the US between 1911 and 1917. Both Nkrumah and Ho wrote letters in which they expected that the US would support their independence movements, especially against European colonial powers. Both were seriously disappointed. The US succeeded in having Nkrumah deposed in 1966. Ho died before the Vietnamese people forced the US forces to retreat from their country.

¹⁸ W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1962)

itself was never foreign) while it developed the capacities to reach its national goals. The fiction of 'invitation' could provide the trigger for either unilateral intervention or application of one of the US post-war vassal systems (e.g. NATO, SEATO etc.)¹⁹

The language used

Any explanation as to how the US regime could wage this war for some thirty years with virtually no domestic opposition must give due weight to the language used to control both private and public responses to the regime's actions, both in Vietnam and at home. It is not accidental or trivial that the events in Indochina were almost never called a war. It was always an 'intervention', a 'conflict', or a 'quagmire' from which finally the US had to 'extricate itself', to 'withdraw', to 'reduce its exposure', to 'get out'. Even as the last US Americans²⁰ and their Vietnamese retainers were being ferried out of Saigon forty years ago, there was no talk of surrender. Richard Nixon always spoke of 'peace with honour': this is the perfume of a bully applied to the skin of a coward.

As far as the White House, the Congress, the military and other government agencies were concerned, the US was never a party to the war, merely an intervener. Hence it had no obligations or responsibilities to either of the principals. The US essentially used a shell company to conduct the war and through fraudulent bankruptcy to escape the duties incumbent upon a vanquished aggressor. Thirty years later this was still the dominant perspective and hence the implicit policy of the

¹⁹ US post-war military operations abroad were supposed to be justified either by 'invitation' of individual governments or through 'collective security' arrangements. The first of these was NATO formed to galvanise Western Europe as an anti-Soviet military alliance. SEATO, the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation, was founded in 1954 to include Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, France and the United Kingdom as a US-led anti-communist block. India was non-aligned. SEATO was dissolved in 1977. The Organisation of American States (OAS) had been founded by the US in 1948 to facilitate a similar policy in Latin America.

²⁰ As opposed to the rest of the Americans – South, Central, Latin etc.

US regime (e.g. promised reparations never paid) toward the people and government of Vietnam. For US Americans, the war against Vietnam is still seen primarily as a misguided intrusion in a war the Vietnamese should have been able to fight among themselves. When critics of US policy get serious they say the same things about Vietnam and all subsequent US wars — when the US military does not prevail. Namely US 'hubris' — meanwhile also a cliché — led the US government to believe it knew best and was capable of imposing a solution to other people's problems.

The basic pattern of colonial warfare

All these arguments however, are beside the point. They only serve to obfuscate, conceal or simply deny the essential facts of the war against Vietnam. First it was an invasion and war against the Vietnamese people as a whole, extending to all of Indochina. Second, it was a unilateral action by the US regime, neither provoked nor unplanned. Thirdly, it was neither a unique nor necessary action. In fact the US war against Vietnam was consistent with the basic pattern of colonial warfare that shaped the white-settler republic when it was founded. As in all US wars against non-whites, the strategy and tactics derive from the fundamental principles of white America: Negro slavery and annihilation of indigenous peoples.²¹ The arrival of advisors in Vietnam was not an isolated security action. The US regime was simultaneously active throughout Southeast Asia, in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, together with its only real ally in the region, the Chinese gangster fascists of the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek who had been driven to Formosa in 1949.

The domino theory, popularised by President Eisenhower, was — as is so often the case with US policy

²¹ For simplification the term 'white' is used in its ideological sense following the argument extensively articulated in Theodore White's *The Invention of the White Race* (Vol. 1 1994, Vol. 2 1997). White in this sense refers to both implicit and explicit white supremacy by means of enforced race-based practices as well as direct and indirect benefits accrued usually at the expense of non-whites. It does not mean imputing racism *per se* to every particular member of the group so identified.

pronouncements — a deceptive reversal of perspective. US Asia–Pacific policy after the defeat of Japan (from which the Soviet Union was deliberately excluded) was to start from Japan and capture all the countries needed to feed it, while preparing to open the door to China as wide as possible for US corporations. The reversal in Korea was seen as the harbinger of future failures once China had been lost to Mao. At the same time as the US was murdering some three million Koreans and levelling every town and city north of the 38th parallel, MacArthur’s friends on Formosa were hoping they could sufficiently ingratiate Washington to have a sign-off on — if need be even nuclear — restoration to the mainland. This ‘unknown war’ was the template for US policy in Vietnam but since hardly any American has a clue about the US war in Korea, they believe Vietnam was a unique and isolated case — an anomaly and misadventure for US Americans.²²

Korea was divided by the US.²³ The popular government already in place when US forces invaded was deposed and a fascist, educated by US Christian missionaries, named Syngman Rhee, was installed. Rhee proceeded with US help to wage a major counter-insurgency to destroy peasant resistance to further expropriation of their rice crops to feed the Japanese. When the Korean army in the North under Kim Il Sung marched into Seoul they were greeted as liberators who chased the hated Rhee into the protection of the US military. Truman used subterfuge (as Johnson would later) to get a UN blanket and also avoid a declaration of war before unleashing the most vicious bombing campaign ever waged on a country with no air defence and no air force. The bombing was so

²² Bruce Cumings prefers the term ‘unknown’ as opposed to the more common description ‘forgotten’ since at least in the West, especially in the US, almost total ignorance of the war prevails. For detailed treatment of the war and its origins: see Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Vol. 1 1980, Vol. 2 1991). I draw on this extensive work and reading of many of the primary sources he cites for the recount of US Asia-Pacific policy and the Korean War. See also Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea* (2010).

²³ As had been agreed with the Koreans and the US, the Soviet Union withdrew its forces in 1948, while the USMGK backed Syngman Rhee in the formation of the Republic of Korea with its capital in Seoul. US Forces are still there fifty years after they began their occupation.

comprehensive that when someone in the National Security Council suggested using an atomic bomb against the North, Dean Rusk said that made no sense since the US Air Force had already destroyed everything in the North that an atomic bomb could hit.²⁴

Despite MacArthur throwing every conceivable conventional weapon into the battle, massive troop deployments, endless saturation bombing and murderous covert action against the civilian population (all to reappear in Vietnam), the North Koreans forced the US Forces out of the North before a ceasefire was declared. The war has yet to end and the US has drawn one lesson from it: South Korea can only be controlled by full-scale military occupation. That occupation continues to this day, with the largest contingent of US military forces outside of the continental US based in South Korea.

After this humiliating defeat, only hedged by the presence of a huge standing army on the peninsula, the US regime feared their hopes of absorbing French Indochina would also be dashed. No-one among the US ruling elite wanted to see Indochina go the way of Korea. On the other hand everyone responsible for policy in Korea (and Dean Rusk²⁵ was one of the most important people with Korea experience) knew that they could not hold Vietnam if China intervened. Hence the pretence that at best a limited war would be waged in Indochina to avoid 'great power confrontation' was a deceptive statement of policy at best.

The US had brokered Japanese colonisation of Korea at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Koreans became slaves of the Japanese and Theodore Roosevelt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. (Proof that even making a presidential

²⁴ 'In North Korea there were no atomic targets. We were bombing with conventional weapons everything that moved in North Korea.' Interview in *Korea: The Unknown War*, Thames Television (UK) 1988.

²⁵ David Dean Rusk (1909-1994) was a Rhodes scholar and became a US Army intelligence officer during WWII; later Deputy Under Secretary of State and then Assistant Secretary of State for Far East Affairs, and finally Secretary of State to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (1961-1969). It was he who proposed the 38th parallel as the demarcation between US-occupied Southern Korea and the North.

warmonger into a Nobel laureate has its precedent.) Japan used the South as a breadbasket to provide cheap food for its own population and, taking advantage of mineral wealth and water, industrialised the North. When MacArthur arrived in the capital of his expanded Pacific viceroyalty, it became clear that cheap food would have to flow to Japan if the economy was to be rebuilt as planned. The USMGK arrived in Seoul and helped assure that the rice crop in the South was faithfully delivered to Japan. Korean peasants could starve, and did.

Essentially the same process occurred in Indochina, except the French had control over the rice export from Vietnam along with exploitation of other sources of wealth. When Japan invaded, Vichy France joined with the Japanese Empire and continued to make money. However when the war ended France was poorly equipped to maintain control of its Asian colony.²⁶ Finally France appealed to the US for support. Although the US financed the restored colonial regime, its Asia-Pacific policy anticipated US displacement of Europeans. The French surrendered, leaving the 'shell company', the Republic of Vietnam in Saigon, which the US continued to fund. There were no plans to alter the economic relationships that had made rice exports profitable business. Things had changed in Asia since the ceasefire in Korea. No doubt the regime in Washington, now resigned to the Chinese Revolution — even if the government in Peking was not recognised — hoped to develop an economical means of stabilising a US vassal in the South, as in Korea, but without going to war against China again.

'Credibility'

Why were so many official and semi-official discussions about the need for US presence in Vietnam focussed on 'credibility'?

²⁶ Initially British troops were sent to Saigon to help the French suppress Vietnamese nationalists intent on ejecting the French, as colonisers and collaborators under Japanese occupation. Ultimately the first uprisings were defeated by British and French troops — and as in Korea — along with elements of the Japanese constabulary who were released from prison for that purpose. See John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried* (2006).

The answer I believe is simple. The cost of the war in Korea was enormous (and with the occupation remained so). A major political purge was necessary to prevent opposition to the war from destabilising the US regime itself. As exaggerated as this may sound, the classified decisions of the National Security Council acknowledged the need for massive military expenditure to prevent the economy from reverting to its 1930s depression. They also reflected an awareness that without military force (both overt and covert) the US could not continue to control and consume the current disproportionate amount of the world's resources. The people in Washington — in other words the bureaucratic apparatus of the US corporate state — had to reassure the ruling class for which it works that the state has the ways and means to impose the political, social, and economic priorities of US corporations and the class that dominate them. This obviously meant the capacity to intimidate peoples and countries whose resources are targeted.

The great danger for Washington was that having set the target of absorbing Europe's empires after World War II, it would lack the force needed to maintain that control. Since it is impossible to say this openly in the US — hence also the classification of such NSC documents — it has been necessary to create and maintain another discourse that carefully separates economic, political and social issues. In the US, race plays a very crucial role in upholding these cognitive barriers — in preventing open discussion of class or capitalism or the nature of the plutocracy that rules the US. Race — specifically the constant terror waged against African-Americans — is used to consolidate the fictive 'white race' which in turn can identify with the 'white' ruling class as opposed to the black descendants of slaves. The complement of race is ethnicity. At the same time as African-Americans are terrorised in order to constitute 'whiteness', ethnicity helps constitute patriotism. Prior to the Russian Revolution, Americans were to be separated from anarchists. After 1917 Americans were to be separated from communists. Anarchism and communism were defined as foreign and usually associated with specific ethnic

groups imported as labourers to the US from Europe. (Asians were subjected to the race code.²⁷ American patriots could license or even abandon their ethnicity by dogmatic compliance with US political orthodoxy, especially abandoning their mother tongue along with any European ideas they had brought with them (unless of course they were monarchist or fascist).

War abroad and a purge at home

Hence at the outbreak of peace in 1945, the US corporate elite was acutely aware not only of an impending collapse in the rate and amount of profit the administered wage and price regime had assured during the war, they were also faced with global resurgence of revolutionary and nationalist movements — especially among the inferior coloured races. This could (and did) catalyse radicals and African-Americans and Native Americans in the US. So it was war abroad and the great purge with Senator Joseph McCarthy as its poster child and the Klan as its Southern delivery boys. While the suppression of political radicalism among whites was successful, the defeat of the Black liberation movement in the US required more time and a very nasty covert campaign, including imprisonment, detention, torture and assassination. While CIA advisors were developing what would be called the Phoenix Program in Vietnam — an improvement and systematic organisation of the methods used in Korea — the FBI, together with Army Intelligence and local police forces were waging a counterinsurgency equivalent against Blacks and Indians in the US. Even liberal youth were targeted, e.g. the students killed during the notorious demonstration at Kent State university.

²⁷ E.g. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (only repealed in 1943), the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. These US immigration laws were specifically 'race' based. Racial discrimination and terrorism against Asians, especially Chinese. Executive Order 9066, issued by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942, authorised the deportation and incarceration of US citizens of Japanese origin or descent, without due process. The last internment camp was closed in 1946. Ronald Reagan was said to have made a small fortune dealing in forced sales of real estate forfeited by interned Japanese.

Until World War II, wars among whites were essentially waged in order to divide or redivide colonies and protectorates. After WWI Germany had been excluded from the international community (of colonial empires). Britain and France eliminated all the other European colonial competitors with the help of the US and by promoting ethnic nationalism among the multiethnic Central powers. This created a new group of national states and they were institutionalised within what became the League of Nations.²⁸ When the German industrial and financial elite decided to recapture its imperial prerogatives — of which it had been unjustly deprived by the Anglo-French armistice terms — the now inconvenient nationalism was brushed aside so that Nazi Germany could exploit Eastern Europe rather than threaten Anglo-French overseas interests. In the Asia-Pacific region (and Africa) it should be noted concessions to nationalism were scarcely considered — this was a white man's prerogative.

Nationalism is abandoned

World War II was another matter entirely. The US emerged richer and unscathed with its long sought after control of Japan and the old empires hopelessly indebted to US bankers. The nationalism in Eastern Europe that had been abandoned to pacify Hitler and encourage his campaign against the Soviet Union was now useful again to attack the temporary ally and revive the US 'open door policy' in the dependencies of its biggest debtors.

It was almost impossible to avoid extending national self-determination to the non-whites after the war. Britain would be forced to grant its largest, non-white dominion independence in 1947. This was not only a political necessity

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the role ascribed to British support of nationalist movements in Europe prior to and during WWI, see Markus Osterrieder, *Welt im Umbruch* (2014). For a detailed argument as to the change in British policy under Neville Chamberlain, usually connected with so-called 'appeasement', see Carroll Quigley, *The Anglo-American Establishment* (1982). Quigley argues that Chamberlain secretly sacrificed the sovereignty of Czechoslovakia and then Poland to facilitate Germany's advance against the Soviet Union and to divert it from threatening the British overseas empire.

but was no doubt catalysed by Britain's enormous trade deficit with India after the war. Although as Michael Manley once pointed out in an interview, the United Nations system, including the so-called Bretton Woods institutions (IMF/World Bank) were conceived by the colonial empires (or what was left of them) on the assumption that their dependencies would continue to be economically subordinated. In fact this is the way most of the Charter and the Bretton Woods instruments have been implemented. But on its face the language was taken to be a departure from the League of Nations which did not seriously consider de-colonisation, but mere reapportionment of territory.

With Indian independence the white privilege of dominion status or even complete independence could no longer be defended — financially or ideologically. The same process unfolded in the French empire. With very few exceptions, territorial colonialism was doomed.

The US accomplished a major ideological innovation during WWI, the fruits of which only became apparent after 1945. Until the end of the 19th century US imperialism was expressed mainly in killing Native Americans, taking their land and working it with slaves or European immigrant labour. In the West, Mexicans and Chinese were used instead of African slaves or European immigrants. Overseas colonial enterprise was undertaken by US corporations or pirates who, when in need of help, called in the US Marine Corps or a few naval ships. This was corporate conquest and was state-subsidised but not state-sponsored or administered. Essentially US colonial enterprise followed the model of the British East India Company, even employing company armies or buying the local government for the same purpose.²⁹ Hence the US regime had almost no colonial bureaucracy to maintain with taxes. This was the model that the US pursued after 1945: after forcing open the doors of its European rivals, it protected its corporations while they invaded and extracted everything they could get out of the target country without any traces of an

²⁹ For a historical examination of 'the world's first multinational corporation' see Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational* (2006).

imperial government. People could learn to hate United Fruit and still love 'the American way of life'. The 'American way of life' was not obviously racist since it was not the same as the British or French lifestyle visible in all their colonies. It had been marketed successfully despite the vicious racism prevailing in the US itself. When linked with the promises of the United Nations Charter it inspired people to imagine independence and prosperity that had previously been reserved only to the white races and nations. More than a few nationalists from Africa and Asia went home believing that the US would champion true independence and progress.

Given this impressive marketing accomplishment and the expectations it awakened throughout the world, US Asia-Pacific policy could not be articulated in the terms used by its European predecessors. Another US advantage was that it was formally free of monarchs and emperors. The term 'empire' just did not seem to fit.

Control of people not territory

US domination after the Creel Committee expressed itself foremost in psychological terms.³⁰ The aim of US imperialism became the control of people not territory. Rather than importing an extension of feudal forms, the regime fosters private property (mainly for its corporations) and the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the American way of life. The 'American way of life' is an integrated discipline including economic and psychological coercion/bribery and backed by covert, largely corporate force. Its principal instruments are private ownership and 'autistic' individualism. Thus it is a totalising and totalitarian world view: to see life as American without actually being an American requires a vast array of consumption habits, social rituals, and obsession with personal liberty as opposed to healthy social organisation.³¹

³⁰ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_on_Public_Information> and George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (1921).

³¹ Anthony Sampson, *The Sovereign State* (1973) discusses ITT as a typical totalitarian US corporation. An extensively researched

Continues at the foot of the next page.

Hence when the 'enemy' was conceived in order to give content to the all-encompassing fear of 'communism', a caricature emerged: the extreme opposite of this 'American way of life'. Neither Americans, nor anyone else can actually find a communist or communism that fits the image propagated by the regime. The simple reason is there is no counter-ideology constituted solely by the negation of this marketing product. Communism for the US regime and its praetorian guard around the globe is nothing more than a label for the enemy which, in order to appear convincing, must threaten the subject population with the loss of something they value. Since not everyone values the same elements of the 'American way of life' the regime is forced to defend them all at once and punish any and every heresy — like its ideological ancestor the Roman Catholic Church, selling salvation (for money) or torturing and executing those who failed to show adequate enthusiasm for the faith.

The first war in Vietnam, the one fought for credibility, to oppose communism, to defend the American way of life or 'freedom' — this was a crusade in the most medieval sense of the word. It was a summons to white folks (although disproportionately more coloured folks died) to punish heretics, to bring salvation to Vietnam by subjecting the entire country to an *auto de fé*. As Michael McClintock called the policy: convert or annihilate.³² Of course in an *auto de fé* one does both.

In the ointment

In 1966, the US anthropologist Jules Henry wrote in *The Nation*:

'The establishment throughout Southeast Asia of

Footnote 31 continued

description of the DuPont companies can be found in Gerald Colby Zilg, *Beyond the Nylon Curtain* (1974). Reissued in 2014 in the Forbidden Bookshelf series, Colby Zilg not only describes the oldest and richest industrial dynasty in the US and its ubiquitous role in the economy, he shows the extent to which US policies and military operations were influenced, if not driven by corporations of which DuPont was one of the most powerful.

32 Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft* (1992)

industrial complexes backed by American capital is sure to have a salutary effect on the development of our foreign involvement: the vast land's cheap labour pool will permit competition with the lower production costs of Chinese and Japanese industry, which have immobilised our trading capabilities in Asia for many years..... The destruction of the Vietnamese countryside is the first, and necessary step, to the industrialisation of Vietnam and the nationalisation of its agriculture.³³

Henry's assessment of US Asia-Pacific policy was quite controversial at the time, certainly not because it was peculiar but because it was open. Social science in America has occasionally been critical but most of its practitioners, seated in well-endowed universities and research institutions, were wittingly and unwittingly complicit in the collection and analysis of data to advance corporate penetration of markets, both at home and abroad.³⁴

Social scientists were first employed on a large scale in the US during the so-called 'Progressive Era'. They replaced or augmented the work previously done by missionaries in the colonies. That is to say they were on one hand part of the informal intelligence apparatus supplying the data about indigenous cultures and social structures then used by colonial

33 Jules Henry, 'Capital's last frontier', *The Nation*, 25 April 1966.

34 The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations have not only acted as conduits for covert funding of research, they have often provided cover for CIA operatives. Anthropology has had some notorious intelligence operatives such as Margaret Mead. Foundation-funded social science survey studies were used intensively during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s both to produce intelligence about popular movements in Latin America but to identify structures and personnel that were then targeted by state-sponsored death squads. More innocuously the foundations use their resources on the behalf of corporations and the state to reward ideological conformity or promote it. Not everyone who benefits from this largesse is aware of the source of their funding or the purposes to which it may be used or why it was funded. The fact that links are occasionally disclosed has yet to diminish the deniability these corporate institutions offer. The East-West Centre in Hawaii is one institution that has educated and trained numerous covert operatives in the Asia-Pacific region. See, *inter alia*, James Petras, 'The CIA and the Cultural Cold War Revisited', *Monthly Review* (November 1999).

authorities to penetrate local communities either to turn them in favour of the invading forces or to make administrative and military measures against them more effective.

Social science as a profession developed as an academic discipline largely through the funding of corporations that recognised its value for training management cadre sensitive to population control issues. Parallel to eugenics, which essentially saw control in terms of depopulation, intensive research was devoted to manipulating indigenous social structures in the same way marketing was elaborated as a system of surveillance and intervention to control the population of industrialised societies. This was fostered by the process of professionalisation, especially in medicine and journalism. The outgrowth of professionalising healthcare and information flows drew directly on the experience of missionaries: the gospel and medical mission both had ostensibly civilian 'developmental' agendas. However they were actually techniques for social reengineering. In Vietnam this led to the creation of extensive programmes combining provision of clinics (also used as fronts for covert action) and opinion survey action (in Vietnam the Phoenix component was called 'census grievance'). Pacification meant everything short of total depopulation of the countryside.

Henry's point-blank analysis of the strategic and tactical operations of capital was certainly a source of embarrassment to those who were determined to keep imperialism cloaked in philanthropic garb. Henry's honest statement of the US regime's objectives in Southeast Asia (already a firm component in US Latin America policy) actually describes the creation of 'surplus population' that results from Marx's 'primitive accumulation'. Traditionally the surplus population filled factories with labour and facilitated the conquest and colonisation of foreign territories. Walt Rostow reduced this process to the euphemistic model called 'stages of development'. 'Development' is simply the strategic implementation of capital accumulation processes, either by conquest or institutional grafting. The division of labour — usually depicted as an element of progress — includes

'professionalisation' which is simply another term for social reorganisation of knowledge to create wealth extraction hierarchies. The consequence of this intellectual development is simply the systematic degradation of human relations.

It is no accident that the most sophisticated and differentiated social formations, states, are almost universally genocidal when it comes to the treatment of the 'countryside' — especially so-called indigenous peoples who are then relegated to the status of 'primitive' — another euphemism meaning worthless or non-persons. The creation of states and their progeny, the multinational corporations, has exhibited what may be called nihilistic tendencies. These can be seen best in the continual destruction which accompanies supposed creativity and stabilisation. Therein lies one of the central contradictions in both imperial crusades and wars of national liberation. In other words, if we take the finite nature of the planet seriously and with it the fact that humans are ultimately terrestrial (as opposed to aquatic or aerial) creatures, the basic struggle can be reduced to how any given portion of the human species establishes its ability to survive on the finite amount of land the planet offers. With the exception of the insignificant quantity of landfill concentrated in coastal and riverine regions, the amount of habitable land has not changed much in the course of human history. The allocation for occupation and exploitation of that land constitutes the underlying dispute at the core of all 'advanced' political organisations. Yet this central issue remains one of the most obfuscated. This source of conflict in everyday life within so-called developed countries is obscured both by the high level of urbanisation and the subsequent derivative forms of land occupation and use found there. Suppression of this issue is one of the primary goals, if not the ultimate goal, of political warfare.

The legitimacy of any claim to control of land, whether individually or collectively asserted, is still — all industrialisation and digitalisation notwithstanding — the political aim of all social, economic, military or religious violence. Politics in this context means the organisation of the

means to legitimate, enforce and exploit the claim to land — abstracted as territory and endowed with metaphysical attributes from which the claimant asserts sovereignty.³⁵ Since the war in Vietnam, like the war in Korea, was essentially a war against the peasantry, even the post-war Vietnam government was faced with the fact that the peasantry was fundamentally changed by thirty years of US warfare — and focussed on converting the mainly peasant population in the South into a peri-urban conglomeration. After 1975, the government in Hanoi would be confronted with conditions that could no longer be managed independently of the wider economic and political system, which the US still dominates.

In 1953, US President Eisenhower told a conference of state governors:

'Now, let us assume that we lost Indochina.....the tin and tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming....So when the United States votes 400 million dollars to help that war, we are not voting a give-away program. We are voting for the cheapest way that we can to prevent the occurrence of something that would be of most terrible significance for the United States of America, our security, our power and ability to get certain things we need from the riches of the Indonesian territory and from Southeast Asia.' ³⁶

The wars in Indochina, concentrated in Vietnam, can be understood as wars over the control of land. However that, too, is an oversimplification. In fact the major complaint of the European and American forces, and those who led them, was that they often never felt able to control the land. Instead they were barely able to occupy it, albeit briefly, and destroy

³⁵ The title of Thomas More's classic *Utopia* bears a certain irony in that the word means 'nowhere'. One might argue that the search for an irrefutable claim to political order can only end in 'nowhere', in the denial of human habitation as a local and natural given, no different from that ascribed to flowers or even birds.

³⁶ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to the Conference of State Governors in Seattle (4 August 1953) cited in Gerald Colby Zilg, *Beyond the Nylon Curtain* (1974), reissued as an e-book in the Forbidden Bookshelf, pp. 404-5.

its utility for the indigenous inhabitants. Unlike the North American continent, Indochina seemed to resist every means to which the US military was accustomed in the seizure of territory. The simplest explanation for this is that the forces of the United States no longer sought — for reasons the explanation of which would exceed the scope of this essay — to replace the native inhabitants with its own population imported as surplus from the US itself. The US ruling elite did not seek (and arguably could not have achieved) a resettlement on the scale necessary to become a dominant presence in Indochina, let alone Asia.

War aims

In 1965, Henry Cabot Lodge — who was then Kennedy's ambassador to South Vietnam — was quoted in the *Boston Globe*:

'Geographically, Vietnam stands at the hub of a vast area of the world — Southeast Asia — an area with a population of 249 million persons. He who holds or has influence in Vietnam can affect the future of the Philippines and Formosa to the east, Thailand and Burma with their huge rice surpluses to the west, and Malaysia and Burma with their rubber, ore, and tin in the south.... Vietnam does not exist in a geological vacuum — from it large storehouses of wealth and population can be influenced and undermined.'³⁷

Gabriel Kolko distinguishes the initial US war aims:

'to quickly redress many of the post-war global dilemmas and frustrations of its military power, to confirm its symbolic credibility and the technical efficiency of its arms. The goal was to neutralize the rising potential throughout the Third World for revolutionary nationalist regimes....The primary origin of the Vietnam War was the American intervention and effort to establish and sustain an alternative to the Communist Party, and Washington assumed there was a sufficient indigenous basis to give

³⁷ Colby Zilg (see note 36) p. 413

it increasing hope for success.’³⁸

He goes on to argue that US foreign policy after WWII aimed ‘to create an integrated capitalist world framework out of the chaos of World War II and the remnants of the colonial systems....because it sought a controllable, responsive order elsewhere, one that would permit the political destinies of distant places to evolve in a manner beneficial to American goals and interests far surpassing the immediate interests of its domestic society.’³⁹

However, as Philip Agee so poignantly argued, capitalism cannot survive without the repressive apparatus of its ‘invisible army’.⁴⁰

Kolko’s staid formulations are like many that can be found throughout political science scholarship.⁴¹

How then are such objectives to be judged? What do these statements of Lodge and Kolko tell us about the kind of violence organised and unleashed against the Third World? Why should the US regime — given the admittedly vast

38 Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War* (1994) pp. 7-8.

39 Kolko (see note 38) pp. 72-73.

40 The military was subservient to the CIA in Vietnam. However, since the military is the visible war machine this is taken to be the essence of the war against Vietnam. The opposition to ‘military intervention’ of whatever sort is focussed on how to prevent the US regime from deploying its military as an instrument of policy. Agee’s ‘invisible army’ – a pun on CIA – is the organised violence and subversion without which US corporate capitalism cannot be imposed and maintained against the will of an exploited population.

41 I am implying that Kolko – whom I consider to be a representative of the Vietnam War historians who are considered critical and generally accepted on the US Left as authoritative – sees the pacification as a side-show to support the military in its effort to secure the South and stabilise the Saigon regime. My argument is the opposite: the military was brought in to cover the pacification program.

I find the formulation ‘permit the political destinies of distant places...’ to be staid because it does not escape the language by which ‘American goals and interests’ are reified. Whose goals and interests are really meant here? Very little of the work I have read disaggregates ‘American goals and interests’. I believe it is necessary to say for whom various campaigns of death and destruction were parts of ‘goals and interests’. No one has problems doing this when it comes to Germany under the Nazis. However it always becomes diffuse when the US regime is involved.

ignorance of its military and foreign policy establishment regarding Indochina — have had any reason to believe that it could determine the nature of legal and accepted political organisations in Vietnam? To come to a reasonable understanding of what the US regime's aims in the war were, it is essential to know who sets those 'American goals and interests'? Why should the US population, unscarred by war at home since 1865, be motivated to fight and die as well as submit to privation for the reasons Kolko enumerates? Moreover, why were the war aims for the military ostensibly framed in conventional war doctrine — as if this were a war between Germany and France over Alsace — while the real war was fought in accordance with completely different principles? The answer to this question is not made any easier by noting that the US was (and still is) waging war throughout the world, making Vietnam only one theatre of operations.

The US war aims — at least in the terms comprehended by its own military institutions — could not have been achieved by any amount of armed force applied. While this may seem obvious, especially in retrospect, the discrepancy between US military capability and the real as well as perceived success of US forces in Indochina ought to raise the question what the real war aims were and what is the proper understanding of strategic and tactical operations in Indochina between 1946 and 1975. A brief consideration of some 'highlights' might help. Here it is important to pay attention as much to what is omitted as what is said, to the assumptions upon which self-deception fundamentally relies.

CBS News correspondent Morley Safer established the company's Saigon bureau in 1965. Shortly thereafter he was witness to a 'search and destroy' mission conducted by US Marines in the village of Cam Ne, near Da Nang.⁴² His field dispatch became famous as he showed US Marines entering a village with no opposition and subsequently destroying it. His film was broadcast into US living rooms showing marines torching thatched cottages with Zippo lighters and flamethrowers, leaving the entire village homeless and

42 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNYZZi25Ttg>>

destitute. An apparently astonished Safer can be seen looking into the camera while the marines are at work. The report caused an outrage, especially in William Paley's ultraconservative (mainstream) corporate headquarters. In reflecting on the report later David Halberstam added that this was certainly an uncommon and surprising scene because Americans had been brought up to think of Indians burning villages and the US military coming to the rescue — while here it was the US military torching the huts.

Safer then submitted a report on the Battle of Ia Drang.⁴³ The dispatch was broadcast as a CBS News Special Report, introduced by Walter Cronkite and followed by Safer's description of the event with the film. Safer explains that the US Army 1st Air Cavalry regiment was being sent to raise the siege against a Special Forces camp in Plei Mi, located in the central highlands near the Laotian border. The viewer is not told what Special Forces (Green Berets) do or why the Vietnamese might want to destroy the camp. The story continues more or less modelled on the reporting everyone has been taught in the newsreels. At the end of the story the US Army wins: the Army takes a hill that had been held by Vietnamese troops. The settlers have been saved from the 'Indians'.

Thirty years later, he recounted the Cam Ne incident with the same bewilderment to an audience meeting at the State Department to discuss the American experience in Southeast Asia.⁴⁴ He recalled how much trouble he had gotten because of this naïve report. The vicarious shock was magnified by the doubts inserted as to whether this was premeditated arson or merely an extreme reaction to an invisible enemy.

Thus a report of what was essentially criminal activity by US troops was coated with dishonesty. By suggesting that the US Marines had assumed the role usually associated by Americans with the 'Indians' he was in fact providing the subliminal rationale for the unacknowledged counter-terror campaign, which had been and was to remain the foundation

43 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=25x53ibwp7A&feature=related>

44 Media roundtable <<https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia>>

of US military operations throughout the war.

Actually it was the US Army that had historically attacked Indians, burning their homes and destroying their means of subsistence — if they were not killed outright. The burning settler homes enshrined in the penultimate US film and literary genres were misrepresentations of the ultimately futile Indian resistance to invasion of their lands and destruction of everything they needed to survive.

Morley Safer and others were shocked to the extent that they could not point to any white settlers that the marines or air cavalry had to defend. The story of the non-human communists in Vietnam, who were actually Vietnamese but could never be called that, had to be repeated daily and nightly in order for this ostensibly occasional violence to be rationalised as some kind of self-defence. The war waged by the US in Vietnam had to be framed in terms of territorial defence. The vast incoherence between the territorial defence rationale for US conventional warfare — actually the pretence of conventional warfare — lies in the fact that aside from the War of 1812, which it nearly lost to the British, the US has never had to defend its territory from a foreign invader. The overall deceit underlying the war against Vietnam was not the concealment of military tactics but the cultivation of the perverse set of fears among US Americans manipulated according to the country's most primitive but historically well-anchored founding myths and fantasies.

Even the landing of marines at Da Nang was not so much a military necessity as a narrative device to touch the hearts of the home front with imagined memories of the D-Day landing during the 'good war'.⁴⁵ The purportedly most televised war in US history (at that time) would have made little sense to US viewers had they not been force-fed Hollywood/War Department war films and newsreels for decades. Without the thousands of miles of Westerns exhibited as mass entertainment, the Indian analogy would have been accessible to relatively few viewers.

⁴⁵ Whether WWII really ought to be called the 'good war' is the subject of an interesting book by Jacques Pauwels, *The Myth of the Good War* (2000).

Moreover without television and cinema there would probably have been little support for the war at all.⁴⁶ Eisenhower had been forced to end the Korean War not only because of Chinese intervention to help the North Koreans repel 'UN' forces but also by potential domestic disruption as what would be called the civil rights movement escalated.⁴⁷ In fact although the US corporate state has been voracious in its appetite for foreign wars, it has always taken enormous amount of propaganda and compulsion to persuade the majority of US Americans to fight abroad. At the same time however, the massive violence and displays of overwhelming fire power was certainly not embarrassing to those in the US who had been bred to believe in the virtue of American might and invincibility — real or imagined.

The public perception of the war was not only shaped by the reporting during the war but by the approximately two million US Americans who went to Vietnam in the course of the war. Some 55,000 of them died there.⁴⁸ Although this figure is modest in comparison to the number of Vietnamese dead, conservatively estimated at between 1.5 and 3.8 million (Korean deaths are also estimated at approximately 3 million), it was the perceived magnitude of US deaths that had the greatest, if not the only, decisive impact on American consciousness. What might be called 'Post-Vietnam Stress Syndrome' triggers either bouts of self-pity or vindictiveness, sometimes both, in the US. American deaths were not only the major public issue for those opposing the war, while it was

46 See Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (1992) for an investigation as to the nature of 'televised war'. Cumings challenges both the belief that Vietnam was seriously televised and the mistaken idea that the fully televised Gulf War in 1991 was actually shown at all.

47 President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, ordering an end to racial discrimination in the military in 1948. The US Supreme Court rendered its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, declaring 'separate but equal' to be unconstitutional. The struggles that led to that order and the later Supreme Court ruling and conflict between Black Americans and the defenders of Jim Crow continued throughout the Vietnam era. Despite the formal abolition of racial discrimination, the effective implementation in the armed forces took many years.

48 In contrast, 405,399 died in all combat theatres during World War II (1941-1945) and 36,516 died in the US war against Korea (1950-1953).

being waged; they fuel the retroactive appreciation of the war against Vietnam.⁴⁹ The war against Vietnam might be considered the first major war the US fought with a non-segregated military. However the rank and file were disproportionately black and poor. Perhaps it is also no coincidence that segregation ended in the US military once the enemy was no longer mainly 'white'.

The white command structure no longer had to fear unleashing black soldiers on white womanhood since Asians were not considered 'white' within the meaning of the act. They too were only 'gooks'. The desegregated military was by no means purged of racism. Nor could it suppress the racism in its greatest reservoir of white cannon fodder — the South. Returning soldiers rarely had noble and heroic tales to share (if that was ever a significant part of war memory). There is no way to measure the real damage done to the bodies and souls of draftees for whom professional killer had not been the occupation of first choice. Since the war ended ignominiously, the largely working class, poor and non-white veterans had to accept having fought for nothing.

There were also those whose perceptions of the war triggered opposition: to the war, to the military or even to the government itself.

The war that was actually fought

And yet the war perceived had very little to do with the war that was actually fought, even for those who had been there, been in Vietnam (or elsewhere in Indochina unofficially). Allowing for the distortions in memory over time, it is remarkable how few participant-observers have been able to present a coherent image of the war in which they fought. Frequently statements are made like, 'We always won, even if

⁴⁹ It is exceedingly difficult to obtain reliable figures for Vietnamese or Korean deaths because of the nature of US warfare, especially the saturation bombing during both wars. While much has been made of the 'body count' policy in Vietnam, there was no way to count the victims of B-52 raids (e.g. 126,615 some sorties for Rolling Thunder, Arc Light, Linebacker etc.) or murders committed by irregular forces and 'pacification'.

we don't know what.' The PBS documentary, *Vietnam: A Television History*, seems quite typical at least of the film record.⁵⁰ Not a single one of the ordinary soldiers interviewed was able to conclude from his experience what the war's aims were and whether they were even being achieved at the operational level, let alone at the command level. Even allowing for problems of interviewing methodology, the PBS series presented witness testimony at all levels, from ordinary soldiers to cabinet members. Nevertheless the viewer comes no closer to understanding the war as a whole since the story is told in the same way it was told during the war itself. The films and extracts available today in the Internet rely on essentially the same footage, occasionally with different editing.

Another problem, reflecting the real prosecution of the war, is the inconsistent, inaccurate or one might think deceptive designation of the participants interviewed. To give a few examples in the PBS production: John Negroponete is identified as a delegate to the Paris peace negotiations. This is accurate to the extent that the only statements used in the film were his descriptions of negotiations with the DRV in Paris. At the same time this obscures the extent to which he was actually involved in actually waging the war. Negroponete and his colleague Richard Holbrooke (who was not interviewed in the film) were both active participants in the rural pacification program, an element of Phoenix. Negroponete went from rural pacification where he reported operations in II Corps, the military region of central Vietnam, to be the director for Vietnam of the National Security Council.⁵¹

⁵⁰ WGBH-Boston (Public Broadcasting System), *Vietnam: A Television History* (1983)

⁵¹ John Negroponete would first gain notoriety among the Left when he served as ambassador to Honduras during the US wars in Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s. He then went on to serve as ambassador to occupied Iraq. These assignments are only surprising to those who do not know that he learned counter-insurgency doctrine and practice as a 27-year-old in Vietnam. The same applied to Richard Holbrooke who ran the political war against Serbia and before his death assumed overall responsibility for political warfare in Central Asia.

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Another example is the interview with William Colby.⁵² He was identified as the head of the Phoenix Program. The viewer might know that he later became director of the CIA. On one hand Colby is identified as head of Phoenix while on the other hand the film says: Phoenix was run by the South Vietnamese with the help of US 'advisors'. In fact William Colby was the CIA station chief who is considered to be largely responsible for creation of Phoenix out of a program called ICEX.⁵³ Colby does not say what Phoenix was in the film, only what it supposedly was not. The only descriptions of what Phoenix might have implied are left to Jane Barton, identified as a civilian aid worker. This is also confusing because although Ms Barton is described elsewhere (Internet) as an employee of the American Friends Service Committee, another person, Everett Bumgartner, interviewed in the film, is also identified as a civilian aid worker. Bumgartner was William Colby's deputy in the pacification (Phoenix) program and definitely CIA.⁵⁴

The PBS film is a typical example of how an essential part of US strategy and tactics is presented as no more than a side-show. Thus the focus on apparently conventional warfare is magnified to produce and sustain confusion about the war and inadequate analysis at the same time. Today it is very difficult to draw any sensible conclusions about the war in Vietnam because there is almost no discussion about the war that was actually fought. The narrative of American foreign policy and military strategy is still determined on the official level by the myths of World War II. Any attempt to penetrate that screen which hides the unstated policies, strategy and tactics of the US regime ought to begin with the simply question of who specifically wants to control what exactly?

Note 51 continued

John Negroponte, 'Address to the US State Department conference, American Experience in Southeast Asia 1946-1975' (29-30 November 2005) at <<https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia>>.

52 In *Vietnam: A Television History*, (1983) Episode 7 (see note 49).

53 Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (2000), reissued as an e-book in the Forbidden Bookshelf series.

54 Valentine (see note 53) pp. 50-51.

Ultimately there are only two objects of war: land and people. However humans have shown repeatedly through the centuries — they actually have little control over land itself — no one can live without it. So the central question becomes in reality: who controls what people and how?

To show just how easily this issue can be actively concealed one can return to Morley Safer. At the American Experience conference he told the following story about a meeting with William Colby who had just assumed his post in Saigon.⁵⁵ Colby's office called Safer and asked him to come meet the next day:

(Colby said) 'Look, can you disappear for three days?'
(Laughter.) And I said, 'I guess.'
(Laughter.) And he said, 'Well, be at the airport — be at (inaudible) at the airport tomorrow morning at 5:30.'
'No, no. And I showed up and he said, "Okay, here are the rules. You can see that I'm going on a tour of all the stations. You can't take notes and you can't report anything you hear." And I spent three days — made — first of all, down in the delta and they were really, really revealing. There was only one meeting that he would ask me to leave the barracks. And it was fascinating because the stuff that these guys were reporting through whatever filters to you had been so doctored by the time it got to you — I mean, to this day, I still feel constrained in terms of talking about. As Telford Taylor once said to me, he said, "Once you know a secret — one you swear to keep a secret, you keep it to the grave." Well, I keep most secrets to the grave but — and I so I don't want to go into detail, but — and I've often wondered what his motivation was, being a sceptic, why is he doing this, what's the real story. And to this day, I don't know unless he was — wanted an uncommitted witness, some — I just don't know.'

Marvin Kalb responded in a manner that ought to seem bizarre now.

⁵⁵ Media Roundtable at <<https://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia>>.

'Well, at least Colby did it with you for three days. Think about McChrystal inviting a reporter from the *Rolling Stone* in for a month.'

Of course the remark is bizarre because Safer is still alive.⁵⁶

Without knowing who are initiating, managing and conducting what are always called merely 'operations', it is impossible to draw any informed conclusions about the relationships between these people, the institutions they represent and the interests vested in those institutions — the progenitors of the war against Vietnam and the wars for the control of land and population that have continued since.

Wear jeans, millions of flies can't be wrong

Colonel, later major general Edward Lansdale began his professional career in advertising. In other words, Lansdale was a corporate propagandist. He is credited with the campaign that made Levi's Jeans into a 'national craze' and converted plain working clothes into what has become the standard clothing item of the American empire.⁵⁷ Lansdale went to the Philippines in 1950 and where he became infamous for his contributions to the development of US political warfare tactics.⁵⁸ He introduced tactics applied by the US colonial Commonwealth force to suppress popular revolts that began after the defeat of Japan and the restoration of US rule in the archipelago. It was the success attributed to

⁵⁶ Michael Hastings received the George Polk Award for Journalism as recognition for his 2010 *Rolling Stone* article 'The Runaway General', a profile of General Stanley McChrystal. After the article was published, General McChrystal resigned his command. Hastings died in 2013 in a peculiar automobile accident in which his car apparently exploded into flames.

McChrystal was a general out of the special operations stable, from way-back. Hastings certainly was expected to behave like Safer. He didn't and his car exploded. That was some five years later. However, any of these guys would have known the 'ground rules': don't ask, don't tell. A reader who surmises Hastings' fate might imagine that Safer kept his mouth shut for good reason back then – even if it might be unimportant today.

⁵⁷ Douglas Valentine at <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/06/07/dirty-wars-and-the-cinema-of-self-indulgence/>>.

⁵⁸ Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire* (2009) p. 337 *et. seq.*

Lansdale's guidance and the subsequent suppression of the Huk rebellion that earned him a reputation as the US counter-insurgency expert of the post-war period.⁵⁹

The US began its advice and support to the French in Indochina in 1945. The first advisors came from the OSS that already had acquired considerable experience in the region through its co-operation with various groups resisting the Japanese occupation. The OSS had even advised the Vietnamese resistance under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.⁶⁰ OSS operatives helped train and arm the Vietminh during the war. When the war ended and US policy dictated restoring France to power, OSS operators began working with their French counterparts — to the extent the French trusted them — to suppress the Vietnamese nationalists.⁶¹ Thus they were participant-observers from the very beginning of the First Indochina War. Moreover they knew both sides intimately. Today one must ask therefore whether any credibility can be given to claims by those in the US regime that relied on OSS intelligence that they did not understand the nature of the Vietnamese nationalist struggle and the determination of the Vietminh to fight for an independent Vietnam.

However there is a more important point to be made here. Namely that the agents and officers of the US secret armies (aka intelligence community) were part of what became the war against Vietnam from the very beginning — years before the US became officially involved, before the invasion was visible and acknowledged. That means not only did the war against Vietnam begin well before the USS Maddox incident that unleashed the bombs against Tonkin (the province of Indochina comprising the bulk of the Democratic

⁵⁹ The US granted nominal independence to the Philippine Commonwealth prior to actual legal independence later. Puerto Rico is still a Commonwealth, as opposed to a state or independent sovereign entity. Hence the Philippine military deployed after WWII to suppress the Huk were 'Commonwealth forces' – the military of the Commonwealth of the Philippines (although heavily advised by US Americans...)

⁶⁰ For example OSS/CIA officer Lucien Conein came to Indochina around late 1944.

⁶¹ Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (1990) (see note 54), p. 22 *et seq.*.

Republic of Vietnam).

Before describing or explaining the significance of this fact, some points need to be made. Every intelligible argument is always an argument against something. Every open argument presumes that those who are arguing know, admit and accept the terms of the argument and feel constrained by them. Elaborate rituals in courts and legislatures are based on the assumption that only what is openly reported, debated and decided is legitimate. If this standard is applied to the fundamental questions about the war against Vietnam one will soon find that much if not most of what constitutes the scholarly or public debate about the US role in the mass murder of over three million people in Indochina does not come close.

As I have already argued, the war against Vietnam is treated as an 'intervention' which it was not, at the invitation of a 'friendly government' that did not exist, under premises of collective security which were fabricated, for opposing 'communist (Soviet/Chinese) imperialism' imagined (aka 'Cold War') and in a limited form, which it clearly was not. Since the central assertions about the origin and nature of the US invasion of Vietnam and its war against all of Indochina, definitely from the side of the US government and mostly from those who claim to have studied it (even opponents), are demonstrably false, it follows that any argument about the war, its nature and consequences based on these false premises will lead nowhere except to an indirect (by opponents) and direct (by proponents) affirmation of the foregoing assumptions. This leads subsequently to the conclusion — by and large shared by both 'sides' of that argument — that the war was a regrettable mistake. From this consensus arise such tedious questions as 'What should the US have done differently?' or 'Could the US have won the war?' or 'Couldn't peace have been achieved sooner?' The list could continue. To demonstrate the futility of these questions it helps to recall that while a visible if not numerically significant minority of white Americans demonstrated against the war in Vietnam, for both strong and weak reasons, there

was no comparable mass demonstration to demand that the US government fulfil its treaty obligations, e.g. paying reparations to Vietnam for the poisoning and destruction of enormous parts of the country and the killing and maiming of millions of its inhabitants. It took until 1995, twenty years after the last helicopter lifted off of the roof of the Saigon embassy compound before the 'loser' extended full diplomatic recognition to the country that had defeated it. President William Clinton was quoted as saying that the time was at hand 'to bind up our wounds'.⁶² Never mind that President Clinton avoided the draft and any personal wounds at the time; it does stretch the imagination to compare some 55,000 deaths with over three million by calling them 'our wounds'.

If scholarly debate or public politics are to say anything meaningful about the war, then they have to explain not only the 22 year hiatus, with almost Cuba-like embargo conditions, but the inability of such scarred and divided US Americans to acknowledge the crimes of their government and compel that government to do justice to a country it did its best to destroy. To place this in its proper perspective one must consider that although the Allies (US, France, Britain, Soviet Union) agreed that Germany must pay reparations for the slaughter and destruction wreaked by the Nazi regime in the Soviet Union (and other countries), it collected its own share of reparations through corporate (not state) 'investment' in the German economy, including seizure of intellectual property, which was of course given to US corporations, and deprived the Soviet Union of the reparations agreed by dividing Germany in May 1949.⁶³ The US claimed reparations although it never fought a single battle against the Wehrmacht on its own soil and only actually waged war against Germany starting in 1944. The US

⁶² Alison Mitchell, 'Opening to Vietnam...', *New York Times* (12 July 1995).

⁶³ By declaring the establishment of the Federal Republic (FRG) in the western occupation zones, the Soviet Union was forced to support the creation of a state in its zone of occupation. The government seated in Bonn and controlled by the US through Konrad Adenauer was not compelled to pay any reparations to the Soviet Union. Before the official creation of the US vassal, much of the industry (concentrated in Saxony) was dismantled and removed to the US sector leaving the

Continues at the foot of the next page.

concluded hostilities with Germany unilaterally in 1951. By 1955 Germany enjoyed full diplomatic recognition — a mere ten years after the war, and Germany started the war!

The war against Vietnam was 'a mistake' for US Americans: for its proponents, because the US did not win, for its opponents, well, for the same reason.⁶⁴ If the US had won, Cam Ranh Bay would probably still be a major US naval base and US soldiers on leave or liberty would still be raping the local women like many do in Guam and Okinawa, where no war is being waged.⁶⁵ Instead of litanies about how traumatic the war was and self-congratulation among those well situated reminiscing about the good old days in Berkeley (but not Watts), discussion would be confined to obtuse base

Note 63 continued.

Soviet Union with a part of Germany heavily damaged by the war from which to exact the reparations it was due and needed to rebuild what the Nazi armies had demolished in four years of vicious warfare. In fact the creation of the FRG gave the US secure bases in Europe both for its bloated military and its expanding corporations. The German state created by the US in 1949 continues to function as a forward base even since 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Soviet Union. In other words, the US regime recognises even the most flimsy excuse for a government by its vassals, while withholding every dignity from those it cannot immediately dominate.

64 If the war had been won, those 'opponents' nothing to protest. It would have been successful policy. Nobody talks about Grenada or Panama and certainly not about the successful counter-insurgency in the Philippines. There is no public discussion about the US involvement in deposing Indonesia. Some people think Chile was a bad idea but colleges and city centres were not closed for a minute when Allende was replaced by Pinochet. Even the US 'Left' does not like to lose. If the US had won they would still be filing suits for civil rights in Vietnam

65 For example, Bob Kovach and Chelsea J. Carter, 'U.S.-Japan deal withdraws 9,000 Marines from Okinawa' CNN (27 April 2012) <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/27/world/asia/japan-us-okinawa/>>, Ann Wright, 'Guam Resists Military Colonization', *Common Dreams* (17 August 2009): 'In 2008, the US Ambassador to Japan had to fly to Okinawa to give his apologies for the rape of a 14 year old girl by a US Marine. The US military forces on Okinawa had a 3 day stand-down for 'reflection' and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had to express her 'regrets' to the Japanese Prime Minister 'for the terrible incident that happened in Okinawa.....we are concerned for the well-being of the young girl and her family.' <<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2009/08/17/guam-resists-military-colonization>>

realignment measures or other niceties of the war department's budget.

Probably the most hypocritical of all apologies for the result in 1975 — also represented throughout the political spectrum — is that the US regime 'didn't understand the Vietnamese or underestimated their fierce patriotism'. This excuse betrays a more fundamental quality in the 'American' character. US Americans have been raised — or indoctrinated — to believe that behind the face of every person who does not live in the US there is an American yearning to be free (free of everything that is not American that is). Even among themselves, US Americans are notorious for their belief in the natural superiority of their way of life. Even people who have written admiringly about the US have taken note of this quality.

Domestically this can be felt in the oppressive conformity demanded in the 'land of the free'. Tocqueville noted that the conformity of opinion he found was stronger than anything he had experienced under the most tyrannical European monarchy. The German Hermann Graf Keyserling, although he thought the USA was destined to be a great country, said that Americans talk a lot about freedom of opinion but do not think much of it. C L R James, a Trinidadian sports journalist and historian, complained that although his *American Civilization* was complimentary of the country's virtues, it was still confiscated by the US customs authorities and he was deported to England.⁶⁶ The claim to have misunderstood the Vietnamese is cynical when uttered by those privy to the intelligence acquired as early as 1945 by OSS operatives. For the rest of US Americans such a claim only underlines the ethnocentrism or nativism which equates patriotism with loyalty to the United States and denies the possibility, let alone the legitimacy of other peoples' loyalty to *their* country.

The 'American way of life' as a crusade

⁶⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), Hermann Graf Keyserling, *America Set Free* (1929), C L R James, *American Civilisation*, written between 1950–1953 and published posthumously (1993).

To properly understand why the United States of America has been able to terrorise the entire planet, even more than their British cousins did, one has to bear in mind the fanatical religious conviction underlying the 'American way of life'. Whether one calls it a 'civil religion' or focuses on the strength of the weld between patriotism and fundamentalist Christian sects in the US, there can be no doubt that the 'American way of life' became a crusade. Arthur Sullivan's hymn 'Onward Christian soldiers' is even more fitting to the US than for the relatively modest British missionary effort. The British, despite their established church, had an ambivalent relationship to missionaries in their colonial possessions. There was business and then there was the church. In the 'American way of life', business is the church, just as the church is a business. For example, John D. Rockefeller, the robber elevated to the barony of business through his Standard Oil cartel, became a major benefactor of the mainline Baptist churches throughout the country. His grandson Nelson continued this business to enhance his South American investments.⁶⁷

Probably the most infamous of the business evangelicals has been Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist minister who could be seen as a kind of 'spiritual advisor' to the war against Vietnam. Although Graham, in contrast to other white evangelical crusaders, opposed racial segregation early, he was a staunch supporter of US foreign policy from Eisenhower through to Nixon, counselling each president except Kennedy. On the other side, people like the deceased Steve Jobs of Apple was a classic example of business as religion, promoting all the company's products like 'iLife' in the format of a Christian revival meeting.⁶⁸ The archetype of this aspect of the 'American way of life' was Dale Carnegie, whose book *How*

67 See Gerald Colby, *Thy Will Be Done, the Conquest of the Amazon* (1995) which describes the activities of Nelson Rockefeller and his sponsorship of William Cameron Townsend of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, using missionary activity to support his business and political agenda. See also Rubem Alves, *Protestantism and Repression* (1985) for an examination of missionary complicity in the Brazilian dictatorship (1964-1986).

68 iLife was presented by Jobs at MacWorld in San Francisco (2003) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iOWA2wEFPE>>.

to Win Friends and Influence People achieved canonical status in the entrepreneurial communion of faith.⁶⁹

Capitalism is not a popular ideology or political movement but a term for the critique of the political-economic system. Hence there is little explicit promotion of capitalism as an ideal in itself (except perhaps among the reactionary 'Austrian school' which came to dominate economics faculties in the US in the 1980s). Ayn Rand attempted to elevate capitalism to an explicit American ideology articulated in her novels published in the beginning of what would be called the Cold War.⁷⁰

Islam

Today Islam appears to have replaced communism as 'public enemy number one'. Many well-meaning US Americans, embarrassed by the attacks on Islam in a country which brags about its constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom, still feel compelled to follow the regime's public arguments against supposed fanatics because they believe the US to be the bearer of Enlightenment humanism, leaving all other countries and creeds somehow less humanist, less enlightened and less

69 Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936). Another canonical text of the 'self-help' movement is Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952). Self-promotion by the authors and substantial corporate support made these books bestsellers.

70 *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) are her two most well known novels. In 1966 she published the essay 'Capitalism, The Unknown Ideal'. Although she managed to acquire cult status, attracting people like former US Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan to her circle, her vision of capitalism as a positive ideology never achieved a broad following. However Rand did become a kind of aesthetic galleon figure for the Austrian school economists in their crusade against Keynesianism. The Austrian School is generally associated with Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. In the 1950s the Austrian school was little more than a cult among anti-communist economists, some of whom were close to what became known as the monetarist or Chicago school of which Milton Friedman was the high priest. During the Reagan Ascendancy however, the Austrian school emerged from the cracks and has since infested political-economic policy in the US. Keynesianism — to the extent it recognised the need for state spending to ameliorate the damage done by capitalism — was displaced from public policy and public consciousness.

tolerant. To place this misconception in proper context consider that one of the great men of early American history, Cotton Mather, a model of religious intolerance in puritan Massachusetts Bay, was born in 1663. On the other hand Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, after whom Wahhabi Islam is named, was born in 1703. Reverend Mather was a good thirty years ahead, burning witches before the Sunni preacher who inspired Saudi kings to beheadings could formulate his teachings. It is true that the US Constitution prohibits the state from establishing a church or forbidding free exercise of religion. This amendment has been interpreted as guaranteeing religious freedom but it was ultimately a Puritan response to the British establishment of the Church of England with the monarch as its head. It was certainly not a testimony to religious tolerance in public life.⁷¹

When those English colonists declared their independence from Great Britain, the Southerners among them did so to preserve chattel slavery while the rest wanted the freedom to slaughter the indigenous and steal their land.⁷² The majority of 'white' Americans who came afterwards had to accept this or pay the consequences. The compliant were rewarded with 'other peoples' land'. US Americans have learned by and large to accept the annihilation of indigenous

⁷¹ Religious restrictions to eligibility to elected office were common in the colonies that became the US. Only in 1961 did the US Supreme Court declare religious qualifications for public officeholders unconstitutional. For example Jews and atheists had been barred from public office in some states. In *Torcaso v. Watkins* (367 US 488) the Court reaffirmed that both states and the federal government were prohibited from requiring any kind of religious test for public office. The Maryland law in dispute required that even a notary public certify belief in God. A 1997 South Carolina case invalidated a state law requiring the acknowledgement of a supreme being as a condition for public office. *Emerson v. Board of Education* (1947) extended the separation of church and state doctrine to include public aid to religious organisations whether singularly or severally. While many US Americans like to take religious freedom and tolerance for granted, none of these decisions has remained unchallenged in practice. The laws governing termination of pregnancy and the privatisation of social services since the 1980s has created, through e.g. 'faith-based initiatives', problematic circumventions of the Constitution, while the Supreme Court has restrained its hand.

⁷² Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (2014)

peoples because without it they would have been forced to fight against their wealthy Anglo-American masters. In other words US patriotism was grounded in bad faith and dishonesty. Only by pretending, like the settler-colonisers in Australia, that they had acquired or inherited a land without people could they continue to build the country into what it became. Brazil was organised under a similar principle (especially in the southern states of Sao Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina), but Brazil was not in Vietnam (Australia was!).

That is why it can (and should) be argued that the US invaded Vietnam just as it had invaded Korea (and Mexico as well as Cuba in the 19th century) not by mistake, not because of a misunderstanding, or because of some communist threat, but because 'invading' other people's territory is how the US was created in the first place. It is just natural for the US regime to invade territory when that territory belongs to non-whites. That is what was meant by manifest destiny.

The bomb

The atomic bomb was built by the US with the help of a peculiar combination of German and Eastern European scientists. Officially the bomb program was accelerated because of fears that the Nazi regime would build one first. That was clearly Albert Einstein's motivation for writing President Roosevelt — although he changed his attitude toward the bomb later. People like Einstein definitely feared a fascist regime armed with an atomic bomb. However that was not the primary concern of those who ultimately pushed for its use against Japan. DuPont was keen on the enormous amounts it would earn on this exclusive and very expensive weapons project. The hopes that Hitler would do what the Allied expeditionary forces from 1917–1925 were unable to do, destroy the Soviet Union, were dashed at Stalingrad. The bomb offered the Western powers the potential to blackmail the Soviet Union with overwhelming destructive force and no need for troops on the ground. It also seemed to be an answer to the problem of manpower in the Pacific. Strategic

planners knew that the US could never field a force with the numerical strength to dominate China. Dropping two atomic bombs on Japan allowed open-air tests on its main targets — non-whites in Asia and, if necessary, the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union understood this, just as they grasped that the Western allies waited until 1944 before attacking Germany, despite official promises to relieve the Soviet Union by threatening Germany's western front. So when Stalin demanded assurances in Eastern Europe, Roosevelt was compelled to give them. Very few US Americans knew either about the promises to open a second front or the promised reparations and control over the 'road to Moscow' to prevent future attacks on the Soviet Union. When he gave his infamous 'Iron Curtain' address in Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill knew that the Allies had given their full consent to the Soviet occupation. Most US Americans did not.

When US forces occupied Korea and installed the fascist Syngman Rhee in the South, Japan had already been defeated. The Koreans and Russians had forced the Japanese out of the North and they had surrendered in the South. Again, what most US Americans appear not to have known or never mention is that prior to 1949 substantial US financial and commercial interests — in other words corporations and crime syndicates — were integrated in the drug and contraband trade that had been based in the Chinese 'treaty ports' for nearly a century. The foremost of these was Shanghai which was divided into three extraterritorial settlements for the US, Great Britain and France.

Just as US industrial magnates viewed Japanese industrialisation after the Meiji restoration (1868) as a threat to their expansion into the Pacific 'markets', the crime syndicates and their interface to legal business activity, the intelligence community together with merchant banks, saw the Japanese as competition in the extremely lucrative opium trade. The British had established the opium monopoly for exporting opium to China — a right they had won by waging

two wars against China.⁷³ Chiang-Kai-shek had become the local managing director of this Sino-European drug trade until Mao Zedong drove him and his gangsters, together with their OSS supporters, to Formosa. There the Kuomintang (KMT) warlords subjugated the island's indigenous population and waited until MacArthur or some other great American appeared to lead them across the straits to restored power on the mainland.

In the 1950s the so-called China Lobby enjoyed a status not unlike that enjoyed by the Israel lobby today. It is probably no accident that both KMT-ruled Formosa and Israel are substantial hubs for the whole range of offshore illicit traffic, whether drugs, weapons or money itself. Like the KMT, Israel enjoys the more or less unconditional support of the US regime, especially its intelligence community, which maintains close professional links to Israel as well as its other 'offshores'.

In the wake of the Japanese defeat, the British first reinforced the French in southern Vietnam while the KMT was given control of Tonkin. After KMT troops pillaged Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh asked the French to return to displace the Chinese. Given the stakes it is not hard to imagine — if hard to prove — that the French colluded with the KMT to force Ho to abandon his immediate plans for Vietnamese independence. Far-fetched? Only if one knows nothing about the European exploitation of China until the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Douglas MacArthur was a stalwart of the China lobby. He was also the US warlord in the Pacific.

The restoration of French rule after 1945 has been defended due to the exigencies of the Cold War. But the 'Cold War' was stated policy for common consumption, just like the fairy tales about the US relationship between all belligerents in the European theatre. These fairy tales have been so well

⁷³ Opium Wars: First Opium War (1839-1842) and Second Opium War (1856-1860) also known as the 'Arrow War' waged by Britain against China first as retaliation for Chinese destruction of the opium cargo belonging to a British trader. As a result China was induced to lease Hong Kong to the British and to permit them to import opium into China.

marketed in the US that even respected critical scholars have never questioned them — at least not out loud.

If the Cold War is seen for the fraud that it was, then a major premise for the rationalisation of the US war against Vietnam must be seen as equally fraudulent. That does not mean that no-one defending US policy in such terms was aware of this deceit. Given on one hand the intensity of indoctrination to which the recruits to the corporate and imperial bureaucracy are subjected, one can accept that many people in that bureaucracy, both in government employment and in the media genuinely believed in the 'threat'. On the other hand there is a more elemental factor involved. In 1940, US Attorney General Robert H. Jackson, who led the US prosecution team in Nuremberg and later was appointed to the US Supreme Court wrote:

'Activities which seem helpful or benevolent to wage earners, persons on relief, or those who are disadvantaged in the struggle for existence, may be regarded as "subversive" by those whose property interests might be affected thereby; those who are in office are apt to regard as "subversive" the activities of any of those who would bring about a change of administration. Some of the soundest constitutional doctrines were once punished as "subversive".'⁷⁴

Frank Donner notes further:

'American liberalism has failed to curb the repressive thrust of nativism — and not only because it has chosen to take a stand at the wrong point (the courtroom) in the governmental structure. Its commitment to the libertarian tradition has been deeply flawed (I refer here to its dominant sectors) by anti-communism and by subservience to the corporate sector. And, since the New Deal, liberal standard-bearers — intellectuals, academics, and lawyers outside the political mainstream — have been all too ready to compromise a professional commitment to full freedom of political expression as a demonstration of political realism, the price the idealistic

⁷⁴ Quoted in Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance* (1980) p. xv.

outsider must pay to enter the corridors of power in an insider's role. In its retreat, liberalism has historically acquiesced in substantive limitations on political expression in exchange for procedural, "due process" palliatives. In the same spirit, and until recently, it embraced clandestine counter-subversive domestic intelligence sponsored by the executive as a libertarian alternative to such cruder repressive modes as legislation and exposé-style congressional investigation.

Like other dubious enterprises, intelligence has resorted to a claimed professionalism — and in particular, a cosmetic vocabulary — as a badge of legitimacy. Language has become an integral part of the subject of intelligence. *Not because its terminology is particularly arcane and technical, but rather because it uses what George Steiner has called the "complex energies of language" as a shield against the constitutional, political, and ethical attacks to which it is highly vulnerable. (The same defensive need explains the proliferation of euphemisms and pseudo-professional jargon in the Vietnam War era.)*' (emphasis added)⁷⁵

Donner's analysis of the role of so-called intelligence, which he considers itself to be a form of political repression, does not apply only to domestic intelligence operations — notably the Red Scares since the Palmer Raids — but to foreign intelligence operations which became the focus of US foreign policy in the post-war era.

This liberal position is the same held by most of those who call themselves 'progressives' in the United States. In fact, the term 'progressive', easily confused with the ideology of late-19th century middle-class reformism although actually closely related to it, arose out of submission to political repression in the United States under President Theodore Roosevelt. At that time political repression was primarily corporate terror, e.g. the domestic spying and terrorism perpetrated by companies like the Pinkerton Detective Agency

75 Frank Donner (see note 74) p. xiv

and the various railroad police.⁷⁶ In the rural South the Ku Klux Klan performed this function. By the time Wilson became president the demands of 'progressives' for government regulation of corporations were translated into increasing nationalisation of corporate police and the creation of federal police and intelligence services, foremost of which became J. Edgar Hoover's infamous Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). By adopting the term 'progressive' the liberals distanced themselves from socialists, communists, anarchists, and anyone else who advocated fundamental change in the political and economic system dominated by corporations.

The foundations

Having conceded the corporate distinction between acceptable opposition and radical demands for change, a blind eye was turned to America's particular kind of political repression. The result was a thorough isolation of popular movements such as those that aimed to abolish the racist tyranny in the South or mass unionisation in the industrialised North. At this point government political repression was augmented by the work of tax-exempt foundations like those created by Rockefeller and Carnegie — the predecessors of the National Endowment for Democracy founded during the Reagan administration to intensify political warfare abroad. As already argued, at the end of World War II the liberal establishment and corporate progressives both agreed on the need for an alternative to Marine expeditionary forces as a means of coercing countries targeted for (continued) exploitation by US corporations. This was the main reason why William Donovan proposed the creation of what became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) after the US emerged as the

⁷⁶ Harry Anslinger, the first and long-lasting director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, began his career as an officer in the Pennsylvania Railroad Police, the goon squad of Mellon's railroad empire. Interestingly enough, Anslinger — a great rival of J Edgar Hoover — considered his agency an important institution for maintaining white supremacy by policing Blacks who were disproportionately targeted by the drug laws. The FBN cooperated with the CIA in managing the US interest in the international drug trade and hence part of the covert war in Asia. See Douglas Valentine, *The Strength of the Wolf* (2006)

number one world power in 1945.

With the unexpected (and undesired) survival of the Soviet Union the liberal elite saw its failure to directly or indirectly crush a revolutionary regime. George Kennan also saw — and that was the real point of his 'X' article in *Foreign Affairs* — that the US (especially its corporations) would be vulnerable now that there was a major industrialised power capable of defending itself against US attacks, whether overt or covert. This also meant that US corporate liberalism was not the only alternative to classical European colonialism. While it is true that Donovan's ostensible credentials for proposing a post-war intelligence service derived from his responsibility for wartime intelligence directed against the Axis powers, the real pedigree upon which he built was his work as a 'white shoe' lawyer. The 'white shoe' firms were corporate law firms mainly located in New York City. They represented their clients in classical legal disputes and transactions but also organised the political repression where US corporations had their overseas operations. The star among these political law firms was Sullivan & Cromwell, where John Foster Dulles and his brother Allen were partners. John McCloy, the Standard Oil lawyer who served as Deputy Secretary of War during WWII, came from similar stock. The methods that became CIA stock and trade were first used by these law firms and the corporations they represented.

'Intelligence' is called 'market research' in business administration. In fact it involves spying on competitors and consumers/clients. 'Propaganda' is what business folks call 'public relations' and 'advertising'. Finally 'foreign intelligence', which includes 'counterintelligence', is the equivalent of sales and industrial sabotage.

Donner adds:

'In addition to supplying a functional rationale, both military conflict and social science have contributed cosmetic language and images to disguise the realities of investigative purpose and conduct. Thus, for example, sociology contributed the term "data collection" to describe, inter alia, surveillance, wire-tapping and the

use of informers. The FBI uses “domestic” or “internal security” intelligence to designate what I here call political intelligence. It staunchly rejects “political intelligence” as a suitable usage because that includes mainstream politics. However, the terms “political intelligence” or “domestic political intelligence” accurately describe what the Bureau does: it collects information about the politics of domestic targets....Domestic intelligence is our shield against threats to “internal security”, while foreign intelligence is supposed to provide the same protection for “national security”, the interest threatened by hostile external activity.’⁷⁷

How was the war against Vietnam actually waged? It was not a war against two belligerents meeting on the battlefield to contest territory. When the US regime sent its first ‘advisors’ to Indochina their job was to determine how US (corporate) interests could be secured and furthered in the region. When Eisenhower told state governors what the US needed in Indochina — cheap or free minerals, natural resources and of course captive labour — he was certainly speaking with the knowledge that one of his chief foreign policy advisors, Clark Clifford, was DuPont’s chief lobbyist and that his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles represented powerful banking and merchant interests, both as lawyers and personal beneficiaries of their clients. Although he had worked as a junior officer with corporate bullies like Douglas MacArthur,⁷⁸ Eisenhower was no Smedley Butler, his warnings about the military–industrial complex notwithstanding.⁷⁹

The war began with an ‘intelligence operation’, partly to

⁷⁷ Frank Donner (see note 74) p. xv

⁷⁸ On 28 June 1932, Douglas MacArthur together with George Patton was ordered by Herbert Hoover to suppress the so-called Bonus Army protest in Washington. Cavalry, infantry, tanks, tear gas and all the trimmings were deployed against unarmed veterans.

Dwight Eisenhower was an aide to MacArthur during the repressive action taken at the height of the Great Depression.

⁷⁹ Smedley Butler (1881-1940), US Marine general and two-time Medal of Honor winner, denounced DuPont and other companies before Congress for conspiring to overthrow the US government while

Continues at the foot of the next page.

support the French, partly to undermine them and make way for the US. By 1948 the French were no longer able to protect their troops so they launched counter-intelligence/counter-insurgency operations with the help of the CIA. GCMAs⁸⁰ were formed (at the same time as US Army First Special Forces), the precursors of the PRUs (Provincial Reconnaissance Units) developed by the CIA in the beginning of what would become Phoenix. In 1954 Edward Lansdale arrived with his kit. By the mid-1950s US soldiers were fighting with the French and the 350-member US Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) was stationed in Saigon to dispense money to the French and anyone else who might serve US interests in Indochina at the time.⁸¹ This was the pattern set well before the Southeast Asia Resolution (Gulf of Tonkin).

Phoenix is usually presented as a perhaps unpleasant program introduced to help the military perform its conventional warfare role to secure South Vietnam from communist subversion. The reverse is the case. Increasing military deployment was ordered to support CIA's intelligence/political warfare assignment. The US did not want war with China after Korea. It also did not want to openly cloak itself in 'colonialism' by supporting the French to the end or openly taking their place. Edward Lansdale was brought in because of his reputation in the Philippines (all yellow folks look alike) to develop psychological operations. However Lansdale's personal forte was marketing through terror. While his critics said that he was just too idiosyncratic and self-important, convinced of his own mastery of the field, they clearly underestimated something Lansdale understood well: selling the war at home and not just promoting political repression with a smile. Lansdale did not have to be an expert, he just

Footnote 79 continued.

Franklin Roosevelt was president. He also wrote *War is a Racket* (1935; available as a PDF at < <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/warisaracket.pdf>>) in which he admitted that his career in the Marine Corps consisted of leading expeditionary forces to kick small countries and popular movements so that they would not threaten the wealth and property of US corporations.

80 'Groupement de Commandos Mixtes Aéroportés' (Mixed Airborne Commando Group).

81 Douglas Valentine (1990) (see note 53), pp. 24-25.

had to appear like one. In helping to expand the covert war for control of Vietnam, he also convinced many at home that this was the way to win against the Vietnamese as well as domestic and international public opinion. At first it seemed like he had the wonder drug to overcome the Vietminh. When he didn't he became the target of heavy criticism both by civilian and military leadership. Yet by insisting that the great Lansdale came with a counterinsurgency plan — that didn't work — he also gave an alibi to an enormous escalation in political warfare and the subordination of the conventional military to these objectives and the organisation created to fulfil them. If Lansdale was a 'failure' in the field, this 'failure' made it possible for people like William Colby to deny that Vietnam was a war waged by the covert corporate forces, capitalism's invisible army. Even the ultimate failure of the US military to hold ground, to drive the 'VC' or the regular Vietnamese army out of the South could be blamed on the military. The scope, strategy and tactics of the primarily political war waged against the Vietnamese civilian population and the systematic political repression for which Phoenix was born remained in the shadows of B-52s, inaudible behind the tremendous blasts. Meanwhile the CIA could blow craters of its own into the population in the hopes of persuading the Vietnamese of the great transcendental value of wearing Levi's blue jeans and working for the Yankee dollar.

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